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Utilisation of Media Technologies for Distance and Lifelong Education in Africa

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Keywords: E- learning, Distance learning, Lifelong learning, human capital development.

Abstract: Media technologies of television, radio, computer and internet offer flexible and formidable facilities for open distance education and lifelong education for Africa. Yet benefits of these media in attaining goals of distance and lifelong education face challenges of policy issues and organisation.

Introduction

Before the establishment of higher education in Africa, degrees and certificates were acquired by Africans through print media. Even when universities were founded by the colonialists and nationalists, there was still the need for distance education for learners who could not access regular university programmes because of their employment and family commitments. These categories of learners and vast majority of those who could not meet strict regular university programmes criteria have continually depended on open distance learning.

Distance education is the process of teaching and learning that occurs while there is a temporal or spatial separation that is mediated by one or more information communication technologies. In the intense pursuit of distance education lifelong education becomes 'a comprehensive process whereby men and women in groups, in institutions or community seek to improve their knowledge, skills or sensitivities with the objective of improving themselves and others. From these descriptions, both lifelong education and distance education are processes of learning but while the latter is interested in the content of education to make individuals function at every cycle of life, the former provides the technology that makes lifelong learning possible. Lifelong learning and distance education have been related to higher education because those who have had initial education are more likely to seek further education than those who have lesser educational attainment to prepare them for more education. This paper by relying on interpretative analysis of literature available discovered both dearth and discrepancies in the official documents for distance education in Africa.

Combinations of Lifelong Education, Distance Education, Technology and Higher Education

Possible seven combinations by Cookson (2002) of lifelong education (LE), distance education (DE), technology (T) and higher education (HE) have been suggested not only to show their relationship but also their differences. These combinations would give the direction on the extent to which advantages of open and distance education can be taken for lifelong education. These combinations are:

- DE+T. Distance Education involves mediation of some form of Technology that bridges the temporal and spatial distance between instructor and learner, it is impossible to have DE that does not constitute a combination of T.
- HE+T. The most prominent expression of this combination is face to face education

courses that are enhanced through the application of information and communication technologies

- LE+HE. This combination is evidenced by the long-held practice of higher education institution that offer non-credit educational programmes that meet the on-going learning needs of men and women for better performance of their multiple roles. Such programmes are commonly referred to as instances of continuing education or professional continuing education.
- DE+LE. This combination is manifest when numerous providers in both public and private sectors literally provide thousands of on-line training and educational programmes conducted for profit, cost recovery, or for free. Such programmes provide abundant lifelong education opportunities for men and women located anywhere there is a connection to the internet.
- HE+DE. This combination is manifest by the ever increasing number of higher education courses being offered for credit via distance education, with the internet being the most popular vehicle. Although such programmes serve an increasing number of young adults, older and more mature adults tend to be better suited for participation in on line postgraduate education courses that require initiative, self direction, and high motivation.
- LE+T. This combination refer to all instances in which technology is being applied to facilitate learning of men and women across the life cycle in both face to face and distance education settings
- DE+T+LE+HE. This combination corresponds to on-line postgraduate education that for many mature working adults has become the most accessible form of not only higher education, but also lifelong education, and distance education.

Learning Society and the Imperatives of Distance and Lifelong Education

The notion of the learning society is one in which individuals are to be encouraged, persuaded, and cajoled into taking part in learning, in order to enhance their human, cultural, social capital as the route to future employability, economic growth, mobility, and cohesion. Whilst governments must expect to expand their investment in education and training-especially in response to the needs of business and the economy- it is the responsibility of individuals to develop their own abilities and careers on the basis of self-generated learning and by means of modern and effective ICT networks and distance learning. In Africa, mobile phones appear to be commonest means of information. There is little or no learning going by this media. M learning as an accessible medium for learning has not been harnessed by agencies of Adult Education.

Media Technologies for Distance Education and Lifelong Education

Some of the media technologies that can be used for distance and lifelong education are online forum, web content management system, computer simulation, weblog, web quest e-groupware learning management system and virtual library.

An online forum is a web-tool that is used for holding discussions and sharing documents on the internet. A sense of virtual community often develops around forums that have regular users. Forums exist for almost every topic, among which are technology, computer games, fashion, religion and politics.

A web content management system (CMS) is a sophisticated type of computer software that can be used to make the process of making and updating websites. A website can be like having a bulletin board in your classroom. Normally a bulletin board is put on the wall and has information on it about daily activities, a calendar of upcoming event in classroom website can provide the same thing for your classroom but instead of only being visible in your classroom, a website can be seen anywhere and at any time. A computer simulation is a model of a real life or hypothetical situation on a computer. Using computer simulation technology, a user can change variables and thereby see how changes in variables can change the outcome.

Computer simulations have become a useful part of mathematical modeling of many neutral system in Physics [Computational Physics], Chemistry and Biology, human systems in Economics, Psychology and in the Social Sciences and in the process of engineering new technology, to gain insight into the operation of those systems

A weblog or blog is like a journal that the whole world can read. It looks like a normal website but unlike a website, which typically lacks interactivity, a blog allows web authors get feedback on the comments and opinions they have published. Most blog consists of text, and often have links to related information and websites. Some blogs also have photographs, video and audio clips.

A web quest is a learner –centred and inquiry-based educational activity which uses the internet to find, analyse and synthesize information. Web quests enable constructivist learning and require creativity and higher level thinking skills, including problems-solving, analysis and judgement.

E-groupware is an on-line collaboration and management tool. E-groupware can be used in various ways. For example, it can be used as an on-line version of a yearly planner. Because it is on-line, it can be seen by many people at the same time. Your school, ministry or organization can keep track of activities using the on-line calendar and also assign tasks, monitor progress and sort related information

Learning Management System (LMS) is a software package that helps teachers and educators to manage learning content and resources. While often thought as a primary tool for distance education, they are most often used to supplement face-to face classroom.

Virtual library as an educational service is ‘a platform for sharing knowledge aimed at rejuvenating Nigerian schools through the provisions of current books, journals and other information resources using digital technology.’ National Policy on Education (2004) Enhancement of scholarship, research and lifelong learning through the establishment of permanent access to shared digital archival collections is one of the objectives the national virtual library project as stated in the Nigerian National Policy on Education.

Utilisation of Media Technologies for Distance and Lifelong Learning

Advantages of open and distance education can be taken for lifelong learning as stated in the national policy of education but the advantages of lifelong education outweigh those of distance education and more so lifelong learning remains a challenge for governments, organisations and individuals. Distance education is a means by which the challenge can be met. This is not clearly stated in the national policy of education. The advantages of open and distance education continues in section eleven stating the goals of educational services.

Many African Universities run distance education programmes, which at the very best of it are run taking barely the modus operandi of regular programmes and therefore are not immuned to the peculiar militating factors against the success of the regular University programmes. This gap is borne out of the fact that African Universities are not utilising the invaluable contributions web based tools can provide.

- The problem of access to University education will be abated in the sense that many candidates will prefer to go for part time programmes.
- The problem of inadequate facilities will reduce, in as much as there is alternative means of running degree programmes, number of intake into the regular programmes will be subject to the capacity of the existing infrastructure and facilities.
- African system of education suffers from dearth of text books, but with web-tools, there is the likelihood of availability of modules and on-line text materials.
- Candidates have the ample opportunity to go for courses of their choice and not only courses that are available. Performance will be enhanced and quality will improve because candidates are likely to perform better
- The 21st century is a century of Information Communication Technology (ICT) web-based distance education programme makes computer literacy a must, as such candidate as a matter of compulsion become computer literate.
- Access to University education will be broadened because persons from poor economic background can enrol in a degree programme and at the same time engage in income generating activities.
- Web-based distance education programmes take care of the interests of marginalised group; married women, nursing mother(s) women in purdah, handicapped, migrant fishermen and pastoralists whose peculiar situations constitute impediment to university education.

African countries have not been able to achieve these benefits of utilising media techniques for distance education.

Challenges of Distance and Lifelong Learning in Africa

Challenges facing utilisation of media technologies include:

- The poor state of power supply in Africa
- Low level of computer literacy and ICT compliance in Africa.
- Widespread poverty in Africa which constitutes a militating factor against successful implementation of web-based education in the country.
- The state of internet network service is still poor in African countries. Whereas internet network service is the engine room of web-based distance education.
- The widespread corruption in Africa is hydra headed and a cog in the wheel of progress as far as policy implementation of web distance education is concerned

Conclusion

Distance education and lifelong education have been separated from adult education. Every distance education and lifelong education are adult education of some sort. Adult education department need to have strong information, communication and technology unit that will drive all the programmes in the department. African countries need to depend on professional adult educators to handle policy statements relating to distance education and not only on civil servants. Values for lifelong education need to be inculcated in all citizens, particularly those interested in distance education in order to achieve the aim of higher education via technology.

Recommendation and Implication for Policy Implementation

Every university running distance programme should as a matter of urgency run it the program on the web. A commission on web-based distance education should be established. A web-based distance education trust fund should be established. ICT compliance should be a criterion for appointment and promotion for academic staff in African universities.

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